

Stopping the Fleecing of America

By Congressman Jerry Moran

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NBC Nightly News has a popular segment called "Fleecing of America" where they feature outrageous abuses of taxpayer dollars. Recently, one use of taxpayer dollars - earmarks - has been under much scrutiny.

Earmarks - often called pork - are funding requests made by lawmakers for pet projects in their home states. Some earmarks are necessary and practical, like those used for economic development, health care facilities and access to clean drinking water. Unfortunately, some are not. In the last ten years, the number of earmark projects has skyrocketed from 1,200 up to 15,000 per year. The cost to taxpayers for these projects was \$27 billion last year.

These alarming numbers can be attributed to the way earmarks are added to legislation. It has become commonplace for earmarks to be attached to large spending bills in closed-door, late-night sessions. This lack of transparency gives lobbyists and a select group of Members of Congress too much power over the process. Following these closed-door sessions, an entire spending bill is presented to Congress, and lawmakers are forced to simply vote yes or no without the ability to review and challenge these projects. Funding for these earmarks is then

used to entice legislators to pass bills that spend too much money.

I have sponsored legislation to put accountability back in the spending process. The American people deserve to know how their money is being spent, and elected representatives deserve the opportunity to advocate for responsible uses of taxpayer dollars. For years, earmark projects have been included in attached reports. Since Members of Congress are only able to amend the actual text of a bill, not what is attached in reports, they are left without any ability to judge the worthiness of these projects.

The legislation I have sponsored forces earmarks to be included in the actual text of a spending bill. This provides legislators with an opportunity to evaluate and remove frivolous earmarks, which will reduce bloated spending bills and allow legislation to be passed based on merit rather than arm twisting. This also diminishes the ability of lobbyists to get earmarks that only serve special interests at the public's expense.

It is time to change the way we do business in our nation's capital. Being good stewards of taxpayer dollars requires transparency in the spending process. We must stop this fleecing of the American taxpayer.